

May 26, 2008 04:30 AM
Paul Moloney - STAFF REPORTER

Using a felt-tipped marker, Bang-Gu Jiang carefully wrote the words "water purification materials" in Chinese on boxes headed to the earthquake zone.

The Toronto lawyer was at an airport-area warehouse yesterday where members of GlobalMedic, a local aid group, were readying purification tablets and machines for shipment to quake-ravaged areas of Sichuan province.

Two members of GlobalMedic have already arrived in Chengdu with some supplies and will train locals on how to make water drinkable.

"Oh my God, I'm so grateful," said Jiang, president of Toronto's Sichuan Association of Canada. "It's just amazing. You can imagine right now people don't have a safe source of water to drink. We have something here that will help them. A tiny tablet in a litre of water and in 30 minutes you get clean water."

GlobalMedic director Rahul Singh said the two-person team in China took with them 10 portable purification units from a Michigan company. Using filters and ultra-violet light, each unit can supply drinking water for 1,000 people. The team also took along 1 million donated Irish-made purification tablets.

"That's the key – people getting drinking water," said Singh, a Toronto paramedic. "This is the best thing we can send in right now. It will save lives."

The organization plans air shipment of more equipment that could arrive by mid-week, including a large purification unit called The Nomad, which can provide 100 litres a minute – enough to supply 70,000 people – at low cost. Used in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami, the machine produced water for less than a cent per litre, he said.

Jiang, whose parents live away from the quake zone, said people in Sichuan are physically and mentally stressed from the May 12 quake.

"And they're worried about another earthquake coming," she said.

Singh said the mission will cost about \$55,000 – \$45,000 in equipment and \$10,000 for air transport and other expenses.

The 300-member group, which includes Toronto paramedics, police and firefighters, received permission from Chinese officials within 48 hours of offering help, said Liberal MP Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough-Agincourt).

Karygiannis accused the Stephen Harper government of being slow to respond to the disaster.